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LEARN FROM HISTORY?

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# WHY DON'T WE LEARN FROM HISTORY?

*by*

B. H. LIDDELL HART

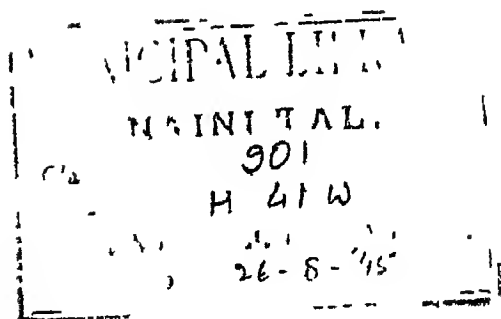
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To  
my friends  
Storm Jameson  
and  
Irene Rathbone



1788

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# Why Don't We Learn From History?

## *Foreword*

IF there is any value in such a personal view as I can offer, it is due largely to the fortune of personal circumstances. While in common with the great majority I have had to earn a living, I have had the rare good luck of being able to earn it by trying to discover the truth of events, instead of to cover it up, as so many are compelled, against their inclination, by the conditions of their job.

## *The Value of History*

History is the record of man's steps and slips. It shows us that the steps have been slow and slight; the slips, quick and abounding. It provides us with the opportunity to profit by the stumbles and tumbles of our forerunners. Awareness of our limitations should make us chary of condemning those who made mistakes, but we condemn ourselves if we fail to recognize mistakes.

There is a too common tendency to regard history as a specialist subject—that is the primary mistake. For, on the contrary, history is the essential corrective to all specialization. Viewed aright, it is the broadest of studies, embracing every aspect of life. It lays the foundation of education by showing how mankind repeats its errors, and what those errors are. It was Bismarck who made the scornful comment, so apt for those who are fond of describing themselves as "practical men" in contrast to "theorists"—"Fools say that they learn by experience. I prefer to learn by other people's experience." The study of history offers us that opportunity. It is universal experience—infinitely longer, wider, and more varied than any individual's experience. How often do we hear people claim knowledge of the world and of life because they are sixty or seventy years old. Most of them might be described as a "young sixty, or seventy." There is



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

no excuse for any literate person if he is less than three thousand years old in mind.

### *The Exploration of History*

The understanding of past events is helped by some current experience of how events are determined. It has been my good fortune to see some bits of history in the making, at close quarters, and yet in the position of detachment enjoyed by the onlooker—who, according to the proverb, sees most of the game. This experience has taught me that it is often a game of chance—if the fateful effect of a personal dislike, a domestic row, or a bad liver may be counted as accidents. Perhaps the most powerful of such accidental influences on history is the lunch-hour. In watching many committees at work, in London and in Geneva, I have noticed how often the balanced consideration of a problem has been upset, and a decision precipitated—sometimes quite contrary to the earlier trend of opinion—by the fact that most of the members had luncheon-engagements, while some dissenting member was able to exploit their regard for the moving hands of the clock as a means to secure his point. It was Napoleon who said that an army marches on its stomach. From my observation, I should be inclined to coin a supplementary proverb—that “History marches on the stomachs of statesmen.”

That observation applies in more than the time-sense. The Japanese locate the seat of courage in the stomach; and such a view is supported by ample evidence from military history of the way that the fighting spirit of troops depends on, and varies with, the state of their stomachs. The source of the passions has also been located in that quarter. All that expresses the extent to which mind and morale depend on the physical, in the normal run of men. And from all that, the historian is led to realize how greatly the causation of events on which the fate of nations depends is ruled, not by balanced judgment, but by momentary currents of feeling, as well as by personal considerations of a low kind.

Experience has also given me some light into the processes of manufacturing history, artificial history. The product is less trans-

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

parent than a silk stocking. Nothing can deceive like a document. Here lies the value of the war of 1914-1918 as a training ground for historians. Governments opened their archives, statesmen and generals their mouths, in time to check their records by personal examination of other witnesses. After twenty years' experience of such work, pure documentary history seems to me akin to mythology. To those academic historians who still repose faith on it, I have often told a short story with a moral. When the British front was broken in March 1918, and French reinforcements came to help in filling the gap, an eminent French general arrived at a certain army corps headquarters, and there majestically dictated orders giving the line on which the troops would stand that night and start their counter-attack in the morning. After reading it, with some perplexity, the corps commander exclaimed: "But that line is behind the German front. You lost it yesterday." The great commander, with a knowing smile, thereupon remarked: "*C'est pour l'histoire.*" It may be added that for a great part of the war he had held a high staff position where the archives on which much official history would later depend had been under his control.

Many are the gaps to be found in official archives, token of documents destroyed later to conceal what might impair a commander's reputation. More difficult to detect are the forgeries with which some of them have been replaced. On the whole British commanders do not seem to have been capable of more ingenuity than mere destruction or ante-dating of orders. The French were often more subtle; a general could safeguard the lives of his men as well as his own reputation by writing orders, based on a situation that did not exist, for an attack that nobody carried out—while everybody shared in the credit, since the record went on the file. I have sometimes wondered how the war could be carried on at all, when I have found how much of their time some commanders spent in preparing the ground for its historians. If the great men of the past, where the evidence is more difficult to check, were as historically conscious as those of recent generations, it may well be asked what value can be credited to anything more ancient than contemporary history.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

The exploration of history is a sobering experience. It reduced the famous American historian, Henry Adams, to the state of cynicism shown in his reply to a questioning letter—"I have written too much history to believe in it. So if anyone wants to differ from me, I am prepared to agree with him." The study of *war* history is especially apt to dispel any illusions—about the reliability of men's testimony, and their accuracy in general, even apart from the shaping of facts to suit the purposes of propaganda.

Yet if the historian comes to find how hard it is to discover the truth, he may become with practice skilled in detecting untruth—a task which is, by comparison, easier. A sound rule of historical evidence is that while assertions should be treated with critical doubt, admissions are likely to be reliable. If there is one saying that embodies a general truth, it is—"No man is condemned save out of his own mouth." By applying this test we can go a long way towards a clear verdict on history, and on history in the making.

### *The Scientific Approach*

Adaptation to changing conditions is the condition of survival. This depends on the simple yet fundamental question of *attitude*. To cope with the problems of the modern world we need, above all, to see them clearly and analyse them scientifically. This requires freedom from prejudice combined with the power of discernment and with a sense of proportion. Only through the capacity to see all relevant factors, to weigh them fairly, and to place them in relation to each other, can we hope to reach an accurately balanced judgment. Discernment may be primarily a gift; and a sense of proportion, too. But their development can be assisted by freedom from prejudice, which largely rests with the individual to achieve—and within his power to achieve it. Or at least to approach it. The way of approach is simple, if not easy—requiring, above all, constant self-criticism and care for precise statement.

It is easier, however, to find an index of progress, and consequently of fitness to bear the responsibility of exercising judgment. If a man reads or hears a criticism of anything in which he has an

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

interest, watch whether his first question is as to its fairness and truth. If he reacts to any such criticism with strong emotion; if he bases his complaint on the ground that it is not in "good taste," or that it will have a bad effect—in short, if he shows concern with any question except "Is it true?" he thereby reveals that his own attitude is unscientific. Likewise if in his turn he judges an idea not on its merits but with reference to the author of it; if he criticizes it as "heresy"; if he argues that authority must be right because it is authority; if he takes a particular criticism as a general depreciation; if he confuses opinion with facts; if he claims that any expression of opinion is "unquestionable"; if he declares that something will "never" come about, or is "certain" that any view is right. The path of truth is paved with critical doubt, and lighted by the spirit of objective enquiry. To view any question subjectively is self-blinding.

In the books used at the famous Lung Ming Academy, the following motto headed each page—"The student must first learn to approach the subject in a spirit of doubt." The point had been more clearly expressed in the eleventh century teachings of Chang-Tsai—"If you can doubt at points where other people feel no impulse to doubt, then you are making progress."

### *The Fear of Truth*

We learn from history that in every age and every clime the majority of people have resented what seems in retrospect to have been purely matter of fact comment on their institutions. We learn too that nothing has aided the persistence of falsehood, and the evils resulting from it, more than the unwillingness of good people to admit the truth when it was disturbing to their comfortable assurance. Always the tendency continues to be shocked by natural comment, and to hold certain things too "sacred" to think about. I can conceive of no finer ideal of a man's life than to face life with clear eyes instead of stumbling through it like a blind man, an imbecile, or a drunkard—which, in a thinking sense, is the common preference. How rarely does one meet anyone whose first reaction to anything is to ask: "Is it true?" Yet, unless that is a man's natural reaction, it

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

shows that truth is not uppermost in his mind, and unless it is, true progress is unlikely.

The contrary tendency was carried to a fresh level of absurdity by the new German Penal Code of 1936 which laid down that things dug up from past history which were offensive to German honour would be punished by hard labour, regardless of whether the statements were true or not. To write true history is always offensive to those who have an interest in concealing it, but Germany was the first country to make it a criminal offence. It is a safe conclusion from history that she will be the chief sufferer.

The most dangerous of all delusions are those that arise from the adulteration of history in the imagined interests of national and military morale. Although this lesson of experience has been the hardest earned, it remains the hardest to learn. Those who have suffered most show their eagerness to suffer more. In 1935 a distinguished German general contributed to the leading military organ of his country an article entitled, "Why Can't we Camouflage?" It was not, as might be supposed, an appeal to revive and develop the art of deceiving the eye with the object of concealing troop movements and positions. The camouflage which the author wished to see adopted in the German Army was the concealment of the less pleasing facts of its history. He deplored the way that, after the last war, the diplomatic documents of the Wilhelmstrasse were published in full, even to the Kaiser's marginal comments. But his particular regret was that such a tendency to indiscreet frankness should have spread to the official military history compiled by the *Reichsarchiv*. Why, he asked, should it be deemed necessary to mention in the account of the East Prussian campaign that troops had given way to panic on certain occasions, or that the roads had been blocked by fugitive transport vehicles? Why disclose to foreigners or to young soldiers, who had no experience of war, that there were moments of weakness? Worse still was the tendency to suggest that the Higher Command had made mistakes—when only six or eight individuals out of six or eight million Germans engaged were concerned with strategic decisions, why unveil their faults? This fashion of writing history without camouflage had quenched in the young

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

every sentiment of respect and almost all joy of living. The general concluded his appeal for the use of camouflage in the sphere of history by recalling "the magnificent English dictum—'Wahr ist was wirkt.'"

The student of military history may be surprised, not at the plea, but that the general should appear to regard it as novel. History that bears the qualification "official" carries with it a natural reservation; and the additional prefix "military" is apt to imply a double reservation. The history of history yields ample evidence that the art of camouflage was developed in that field long before it was applied to the battlefield.

This camouflaged history not only conceals faults and deficiencies that could otherwise be remedied, but engenders false confidence—and false confidence has underlain most of the failures that military history records. It is the dry rot of armies. But its effects go wider and are felt earlier. For the false confidence of military leaders has been a spur to war. This truth comes home to those who have studied the history of the weeks that preceded the outbreak of war in 1914.

### *The Evasion of Truth*

We learn from history that men have constantly echoed the remark ascribed to Pontius Pilate—"What is truth?" And often in circumstances that make us wonder why. I have noticed, as an observer of current history, that it is repeatedly used as a smoke-screen to mask a manoeuvre, personal or political, and to cover an evasion of the issue. It may be a justifiable question, in the deepest sense. Yet the longer I watch current events, the more I have come to see how many of our troubles arise from the habit, on all sides, of suppressing or distorting what we know quite well is the truth, out of devotion to a cause, an ambition, or an institution—at bottom, this devotion being inspired by our own interest.

The history of 1914-1918 is full of examples. Passchendaele perhaps provides the most striking. It is clear from what Haig said beforehand that his motive was a desire to, and belief that he could, win the war single-handed in 1917 by a British offensive in Flanders,

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

before the Americans arrived. By the time he was ready to launch it all the conditions had changed, and the chief French commanders expressed grave doubts. Yet in his eagerness to persuade a reluctant Cabinet to allow him to fulfil his dream, he disclosed none of the unfavourable facts which were known to him, and exaggerated those that seemed favourable.

He had been warned by his engineer staff that the Ypres area, being reclaimed marshland, was bound to revert to swamp if the drainage system were destroyed by the heavy bombardment necessary to pave the way for an offensive. He had been warned by his meteorological experts that the weather records, collated for some eighty years, showed that "in Flanders the weather broke early each August with the regularity of the Indian monsoon," and that "once the autumn rains set in the difficulties would be greatly enhanced." None of these facts did he mention to the Cabinet. Instead he gave a statement of the exhaustion of the German reserves which went beyond even the optimistic figures furnished, to meet his desire, by his Intelligence Staff. When the Cabinet told him that it would be difficult, in the prevailing state of the nation's man-power, to replace heavy casualties, he gave them a definite assurance that he had "no intention of entering into a tremendous offensive involving heavy losses." When the Cabinet questioned the wisdom of launching an offensive without the aid of the French, he assured them that the French would take an adequate part in the offensive—although he had privately told his Army Commanders that he did not expect much from the French. When his offensive was launched on the last day of July, it failed completely on the part that was most vital. Yet he reported to London that the results were "most satisfactory." The weather broke that very day and the offensive became bogged.

When the Prime Minister, becoming anxious at the mounting toll of casualties, went over to Flanders, Haig argued that the poor physique of the prisoners then being taken was proof that his offensive was bringing the German Army to exhaustion. When the Prime Minister asked to see one of the prisoners' cages, one of Haig's staff telephoned in advance to give instruction that "all able-bodied prisoners were removed from the corps cages" before his

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

arrival. The chain of deception continued, and the offensive, until 400,000 men had been sacrificed. In later years Haig was wont to argue in excuse that his offensive had been undertaken at the behest of the French, and that "the possibility of the French Army breaking up compelled me to go on attacking." But in his letters at the time, since revealed, he declared that its morale was "excellent." And the following spring he blamed the Government when his own army, thus brought to the verge of physical and moral exhaustion, failed to withstand the German offensive.

Haig was an honourable man according to his lights—but his lights were dim. The consequences which have made "Passchendaele" a name of ill-omen may be traced to the combined effect of his tendency to deceive himself; his tendency, therefore, to encourage his subordinates to deceive him; and their "loyal" tendency to tell a superior what was likely to coincide with his desires. Passchendaele is an object-lesson in this kind of well-meaning, if not disinterested, untruthfulness.

### *Blinding Loyalties*

We learn from history that those who are disloyal to their own superiors are most prone to preach loyalty to their subordinates. Not many years ago there was a man who preached it so continually when in high position as to make it a catchword; that same man had been privately characterized by his chief, his colleague, and his assistant in earlier years as one who would swallow anything in order to get on. Loyalty is a noble quality, so long as it is not blind and does not exclude the higher loyalty to truth and decency. But the word is much abused. For "loyalty," analysed, is too often a polite word for what would be more accurately described as—"a conspiracy for mutual inefficiency." In this sense it is essentially selfish—like a servile loyalty, demeaning both to master and servant. They are in a false relation to each other, and the loyalty which is then so much prized can be traced, if we probe deep enough, to an ultimate selfishness on either side. "Loyalty" is not a quality we can isolate—so far as it is real, and of intrinsic value, it is implicit in the possession of other virtues.



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

These minor loyalties also invade the field of history, and damage its fruits. The search for truth for truth's sake is the mark of the historian. To that occupation many are called but few are worthy; not necessarily for want of gifts, but for lack of the urge or the resolution to follow the gleam wherever it may lead. Too many have sentimental encumbrances, even if they are not primarily moved, as so often happens in the field of historical biography, by the sentiment of kinship, or of friendship, or of discipleship. On a lower plane come those who suit their conclusions to the taste of an audience or a patron.

Deep is the gulf between works of history as written and the truth of history, and perhaps never more so than in books dealing with military history. If one reason is that these are usually written by soldiers untrained as historians, and another that there is frequently some personal link, whether of acquaintance or tradition, between author and subject, a deeper reason lies in a habit of mind. For the soldier, "My country—right or wrong," must be the watchword. And this essential loyalty, whether it be to a country, to a regiment, or to comrades, is so ingrained in him that when he passes from action to reflection it is difficult for him to acquire instead the historian's single-minded loyalty to truth.

Not that the most impartial historian is ever likely to attain truth in its entirety; but he is likely to approach it more closely if he has this single-mindedness. For the historian loyal to his calling it would be impossible to put forward the suggestion, such as one heard from distinguished participants in the last war, that certain episodes might "best be glossed over" in war histories. Yet these officers were men of indisputable honour, and quite unconscious that they were sinning, not only against the interests of their country's future, but against truth, the essential foundation for honour.

### *Blindfolded Authority*

All of us do foolish things—but the wiser realize what they do. The most dangerous error is failure to recognize our own tendency to error. That failure is a common affliction of authority. From

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

many examples may be cited one from the last war. When reports percolated to Paris about the neglected state of the Verdun defences Joffre was asked for an assurance that they would be improved. In reply he indignantly denied that there was any cause for anxiety, and demanded the names of those who had dared to suggest it: "I cannot be a party to soldiers under my command bringing before the Government, by channels other than the hierarchic channel, complaints or protests about the execution of my orders. . . . It is calculated to disturb profoundly the spirit of discipline in the Army."

That reply might well be framed and hung up in all the bureaux of officialdom the world over—to serve as the mummy at the feast. For within two months his doctrine of infallibility collapsed like a punctured balloon, with tragic effects for his army. But here, as so often happens, personal retribution was slow and ironical in its course. The man who had given warning was to be one of the first victims of its neglect, while Joffre for a time gained fresh popular laurels from the heroic sacrifice by which complete disaster was averted.

The pretence to infallibility is instinctive in a hierarchy. But to understand the cause is not to underrate the harm that the pretence has produced—in every sphere.

### *The Nature of Government*

We learn from history that the critics of authority have always been rebuked in self-righteous tones—if no worse fate has befallen them—yet have repeatedly been justified by history. To be "agin the Government" may be a more philosophic attitude than it appears. For the tendency of all "governments" is to infringe the standards of decency and truth—this is inherent in their nature, and hardly avoidable in their practice. Hence the duty of the good citizen who is free from the responsibility of Government is to be a watchdog upon them, lest government impair the fundamental objects which it exists to serve. It is a necessary evil, thus requiring constant watchfulness and check.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

### *Forms of Government*

We learn from history that democracy has commonly put a premium on conventionality. By its nature, it prefers those who keep step with the slowest march of thought, and frowns on those who may disturb the "conspiracy for mutual inefficiency." Thereby, this system of government tends to result in the triumph of mediocrity—and entails the exclusion of first-rate ability, if this is combined with honesty. But the alternative to it, despotism, almost inevitably means the triumph of stupidity. And of two evils, the former is the less. Hence it is better that ability should consent to its own sacrifice, and subordination to the regime of mediocrity, rather than assist in establishing a regime where, in the light of past experience, brute stupidity will be enthroned, and ability may only preserve its footing at the price of dishonesty.

What is of value in "England," and worth defending, is its tradition of freedom—the guarantee of its vitality. So many talk "patriotism" without thinking what their end is. Our civilization, like the Greek, has, for all its blundering way, taught the value of freedom, of criticism of authority—and of harmonizing this with order. Anyone who urges a different system, for efficiency's sake, is betraying the vital tradition.

The most inefficient democracy is better than any tyranny—and less inefficient in the long run, because less soul-destroying. I have had opportunity to appreciate this lesson of history in observing the enforced or self-decided departure of the ablest assistants of some of our modern dictators, and the gradual deterioration in the moral and mental quality of those who have remained. It is charged against democracy, with some justice, that in a large state it breeds a multitude of small tyrants. But I have not observed that this tendency to "bureaucracy" is any less where Parliament is superseded by the rule of one big man. The dictator, indeed, is even more under the compulsion to satisfy his supporters by finding them jobs. And as the opportunity for ventilating complaints, afforded by Parliament and a free press, is diminished, it is even more difficult to check the abuse of authority by the successive echelons of small

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

tyrants. Moreover, a dictator who embodies the authoritarian principle is constrained to uphold the authority of his servants. Because he is more dependent than a Parliamentary Minister on their support, he is less able to check them so long as they can make him believe that their excesses are accompanied and inspired by personal loyalty to him.

Of a dictatorship it may truly be said—"Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em, and little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum*."

### *The Standard Historical Pattern of Self-Made Despotic Rulers*

In gaining power—

They exploit, consciously or unconsciously, a state of popular dissatisfaction with the existing regime or of hostility between different sections of the people.

They attack the existing regime violently, and combine their appeal to discontent with unlimited promises (which, if successful, they only fulfil to a limited extent).

They claim that they only want absolute power for a short time (but "find" subsequently that the time to relinquish it never comes).

They excite popular sympathy by presenting the picture of a conspiracy against them, and use this as a lever to gain a firmer hold, at some crucial stage.

On gaining power—

They soon begin to rid themselves of their chief helpers, "discovering" that those who brought about the new order have suddenly become traitors to it.

They suppress criticism on one pretext or another, and punish anyone who mentions facts which, however true, are unfavourable to their policy.

They enlist religion on their side if possible, or if its leaders are not compliant, foster a new kind of religion subservient to their ends.

They spend public money lavishly on material works of a striking

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

kind, in compensation for the freedom of spirit and thought of which they have robbed the public.

They manipulate the currency, to make the economic position of the State appear better than it is in reality.

They ultimately make war on some other state as a means of diverting attention from internal conditions, and allowing discontent to explode outwards.

They use the rallying cry of patriotism as a means of riveting the chains of their personal authority more firmly on the people.

They expand the superstructure of the State while undermining its foundations—by breeding sycophants at the expense of self-respecting collaborators, by appealing to the popular taste for the grandiose and sensational instead of true values, and by fostering a romantic instead of a realistic view—thus ensuring the ultimate collapse, under their successors if not themselves, of what they have created.

This political confidence trick, itself a familiar string of tricks, has been repeated all down the ages. Yet it rarely fails to take in a fresh generation.

### *The Basic Flaw*

Nevertheless, it would be untruthful not to recognize that the authoritarian regimes have produced some good fruits. They are to be found in both the material and the spiritual fields. Many social reforms and practical improvements have been carried out in a few years which a democracy would have debated for generations. A dictator's interest and support may be won for public works, artistic activities and archæological explorations in which a Parliamentary government would not be interested—because they promise no votes. It is also to the credit of the totalitarian systems that they have stimulated service to the community and the sense of comradeship—up to a point. In this respect their effect on a nation is like that of war. And, as in war, the quick-ripening good fellowship of the powerless many is apt to obscure the intrigues of the powerful few, the withering of the roots in such a soil, and the gradual decay of the tree. Bad means lead to no good end.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Their own declarations of faith are the truest test of the authoritarian regimes. In weighing the wrongs there is no need to argue over particular cases—which the victims assert and they often deny—because they proudly avow an attitude which makes such instances inherently probable.

It is man's power of thought which has generated the current of human progress through the ages. Thus the thinking man must be against authoritarianism in any form—because it shows its fear of thoughts which do not suit momentary authority.

Any sincere writer must be against it—because it believes in censorship, and approves such mediæval absurdities as the burning of books.

Any true historian must be against it—because he can see that it leads to the repetition of old follies, as well as to the deliberate adulteration of history.

Anyone who tries to solve problems scientifically must be against it—since it refuses to recognize that criticism is the life-blood of science.

In sum, any seeker of truth must be against it—because it subordinates truth to State expediency. This spells stagnation. For all its assertions to the contrary, the Fascist faith is fundamentally the static one, and the liberal faith the dynamic one.

But "*anti-Fascism*" is not enough. Nor is even the defence of freedom. What has been gained may not be maintained, against invasion without and erosion within, if we are content to stand still. To surpass the appeal that Fascism makes by its positiveness, the *advance* of freedom is needed. The peoples who are partially free as a result of what their forbears achieved in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, must continue to spread the gospel of freedom and work for the extension of the conditions, social and economic as well as political, which are essential to make men free.

### *The Fallacy of Compulsion*

We learn from history that the compulsory principle always breaks down in practice. It is practicable to *prevent* men doing something; moreover that principle of restraint, or regulation, is essen-

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

tially justifiable in so far as its application is needed to check interference with others' freedom. But it is not, in reality, possible to *make* men do something without risking more than is gained from the compelled effort. The method may appear practicable, because it often works when applied to those who are merely hesitant. When applied to those who are definitely unwilling it fails, however, because it generates friction and fosters subtle forms of evasion that spoil the effect which is sought. The test of whether a principle works is to be found in the product.

Efficiency springs from enthusiasm—because this alone can develop a dynamic impulse. Enthusiasm is incompatible with compulsion—because it is essentially spontaneous. Compulsion is thus bound to deaden enthusiasm—because it dries up the source. The more an individual, or a nation, has been accustomed to freedom, the more deadening will be the effect of a change to compulsion.

These logical deductions are confirmed by analysis of historical experience. The modern system of military conscription was born in France—it was, ironically, the misbegotten child of Revolutionary enthusiasm. Within a generation, its application had become so obnoxious that its abolition was the primary demand of the French people following Napoleon's downfall. Meanwhile, however, it had been transplanted to more suitable soil—in Prussia. And just over half a century later, the victories that Prussia gained led to the resurrection of conscription in France. Its re-imposition was all the easier because the renewed autocracy of Napoleon III had accustomed the French people to the interference and constraints of bureaucracy. In the generation that followed, the revival of the spirit of freedom in France was accompanied by a growth of the petty bureaucracy, parasites feeding on the body politic. From this, the French could never succeed in shaking free; and in their efforts they merely developed corruption—which is the natural consequence of an ineffective effort to loosen the grip of compulsion by evasion.

It is generally recognized today that this rampant growth of bureaucratically-induced corruption was the dry-rot of the Third Republic. But on deeper examination the cause can be traced

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

further back—to the misunderstanding of their own principles which led a section of the creators of the French Revolution to adopt a method fundamentally opposed to their fulfilment.

It might be thought that conscription should be less detrimental to the Germans, since they are more responsive to regulation, and have no deeply rooted tradition of freedom. Nevertheless, it is of significance that the Nazi movement was essentially a voluntary movement—exclusive rather than comprehensive—and that the most important sections of the German forces—the air force and the tank force—have been recruited on a semi-voluntary basis. There is little evidence to suggest that the ordinary “mass” of the German army has anything like the same enthusiasm; and considerable evidence to suggest that this conscripted mass constitutes a basic weakness in Germany’s apparent strength.

Twenty-five years spent in the study of war, a study which gradually went beyond its current technique to its well-springs, changed my earlier and conventional belief in the value of conscription. It brought me to see that the compulsory principle was fundamentally inefficient, and the conscriptive method out of date—a method that clung, like the ivy, to quantitative standards in an age when the trend of warfare was becoming increasingly qualitative. For it sustained the fetish of mere numbers at a time when skill and enthusiasm were becoming ever more necessary for the effective handling of the new weapons.

Conscription does not fit the conditions of modern warfare—its specialized technical equipment, mobile operations, and fluid situations. Success increasingly depends on individual initiative, which in turn springs from a sense of personal responsibility—these senses are atrophied by compulsion. Moreover, every unwilling man is a germ-carrier, spreading infection to an extent altogether disproportionate to the value of the service he is forced to contribute.

Looking still further into the question, and thinking deeper, I came to see, also, that the greatest contributory factor to the Great Wars which had racked the world in recent generations had been the conscriptive system—the system which sprang out of the muddled thought of the French Revolution, was then exploited by Napoleon



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

in his selfish ambition, and subsequently turned to serve the interests of Prussian militarism. After undermining the eighteenth century "age of reason," it had paved the way for the reign of unreason in the modern age.

Conscription serves to precipitate war, but not to accelerate it—except in the negative sense of accelerating the growth of war-weariness and other underlying causes of defeat. Conscription precipitated war in 1914, owing to the way that the mobilization of conscript armies disrupted national life and produced an atmosphere in which negotiation became impossible—confirming the warning, "mobilization means war." During that war its effect can be traced in the symptoms which preceded the collapse of the Russian, Austrian and German armies, as well as the decline of the French and Italian armies. It was the least free States which collapsed under the strain of war—and they collapsed in the order of their degree of unfreedom. By contrast, the best fighting force in the fourth year of war was, by general recognition, the Australian Corps—the force which had rejected conscription, and in which there was the least insistence on unthinking obedience.

### *The Spread of Compulsion*

The prolonged security of our island home made us slow to perceive the external danger of the growth of this system abroad. And the fact that we had a better instinct for naval than for military matters made us equally slow to realize the internal danger of its more insidious effects. The very degree to which we are sea-minded has made us prone, as regards the army, to catch the infection of a foreign fashion. Before the last war we were fond of imitating Continental types of headdress—with somewhat ludicrous effects. We also imitated what was under the headdress—with much more dangerous effects. It led us to discard the historic tradition of English strategy, on which our prosperity and security had been built up through the centuries. And it led us into a morass—from which we emerged so exhausted as to lose the power of influencing the post-war settlement on lines that could establish an enduring state of peace.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

When one comes to examine the way we adopted conscription in the last war, and to embrace it again precipitately on the verge of this war, one finds that it was really a case of rushing to borrow a fashionable remedy without pausing to enquire about its effects, or even whether it suited our condition and constitution. To put it in the opposite way, long immunity from the disease had made us the more susceptible to its effects, so that when we caught it late in the epidemic, we caught it all the worse.

The effects far transcend the military sphere. Bemused by the cry of total warfare, we have tried to make ourselves totalitarian—with the maximum of inefficiency for the minimum of productivity in proportion to the effort.

At the same time we risked the shortening of our maximum measure of endurance by imposing excessive restrictions and hardships in the name of "total war." In a long war, the issue turns above all on the question of which people first becomes tired of the struggle. Realizing this, wise statesmanship would try to maintain normal conditions of life as long and as far as possible, compatibly with the development of its military forces to a carefully gauged *optimum* level. The less a people feel the strain of war the greater is likely to be their staying power in a test of endurance. This principle has received all too little attention.

The best way to fight Fascism effectively is to fight it with a conscious faith in Freedom. We have been foolish enough to forfeit that dynamic. While professing to fight for freedom we have put no faith in it—preferring to trust in compulsion, the enemy's principle. It is futile to talk of the need for fighting the war as a crusade under such conditions. The crusading spirit cannot be generated by compulsion. You cannot make crusaders out of conscripts.

If, in this imitation of the German way, we have not yet become such a slave-State in practice, it is only because our instinctive autocrats and bureaucrats have hitherto shown more restraint, or been made conscious of more resistance from the long-inherited instinct for freedom among the people. But we have allowed them to shackle us with the fetters of State-slavery in theory; with such a rigid set of regulations that we could be rendered helpless to protest

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

or to recover our freedom if, with the continuance and intensification of the struggle, the present Government were replaced or displaced by one of a more dictatorial tendency.

Some of these regulations constitute a betrayal of our inheritance that would have shocked those who fought the long battle for freedom during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. A grave responsibility is borne by the members of a Parliament which allowed, and even encouraged, officialdom to impose such unconstitutional measures while at the same time turning this country into a potential prison-house, from which in case of defeat or a *coup d'état* it might be impossible for anyone to escape and start a "Free British" movement. The most charitable explanation is that in giving the executive such sweeping powers they were doped by the talk of "total war"—in a war which they did not understand. For efficiency in modern war can be reconciled with proper respect for the basic rights of the individual and his freedom. Indeed, this produces the soil in which initiative, itself essential to true efficiency, grows best.

The present Parliament already bears the onus of bringing us into the war inadequately prepared. Its responsibility would be still graver if, in its belated attempt to redeem the consequences of this negligence, it should be forgetful that it is trustee for the liberties of the people—for this is the foundation-stone of its own existence. Any form of government can suffice for the purpose of carrying on a war; the justification for parliamentary government lies in the purpose of upholding freedom. If it fails to maintain the basic conditions of civil liberty in the course of maintaining war, it nullifies its distinctive purpose and value. And that is the quickest way for it to commit *felo de se*.

If we are to convince the peoples of the world that we are really fighting for freedom, we ought to lose no time in examining our own current condition, and conscience. To make our propaganda meet for consumption abroad, we need to ensure the production at home of freedom *from* want and fear; freedom *for* truth and progress.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

### *The Perpetuation of Compulsion?*

We have become so habituated to military and civil conscription in the wartime years that a large body of opinion is now favourable to its peacetime continuance. Significantly, the advocacy of it can be traced back to the years immediately before the war, and even prior to the adoption of military conscription—to a time when an influential section of people in this country were more impressed by the social developments of the Nazi system than alarmed by its dangers. A campaign for "universal national service" was launched in the winter before Munich. As defined by Lord Lothian, in a letter to *The Times* in March 1938, it embodied the "allocation of every individual" to a particular form of service "whether in peace or in emergency." It was visualized then, and is being freshly urged now, as an "educational" measure.

Such a system entails the suppression of individual judgment—the Englishman's most cherished right. It violates the cardinal principle of a free community: that there should be no restriction of individual freedom save where this is used for active interference with others' freedom. Our tradition of individual freedom is the slow-ripening fruit of centuries of effort. To surrender it within after fighting to defend it against dangers without would be a supremely ironical turn of our history.

In upholding the idea of compulsory service, its advocates have often emphasized that the principle was adopted in our Statute Law in certain times of alarm, and applied in a haphazard way to the poorer classes of the community, during the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Here they fail to take due account of the progressive development in our national principles, and of the way our concept of freedom has been enlarged during the last century.

It was an advance in British civilization which brought us, first to question, and then to discard, the press-gang as well as the slave-trade. The logical connection between the two institutions, as violations of our principles, was obvious. Is the tide of our civilization now on the ebb? In respect of personal service, freedom means

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

the right to be true to your convictions, to choose your course, and decide whether the cause is worth service and sacrifice. That is the difference between the free man and the State-slave.

Unless the great majority of a people are willing to give their services there is something radically at fault in the State itself. In that case the State is not likely or worthy to survive under test—and compulsion will make no serious difference. We may be far from having attained an adequate state of freedom as yet, of economic freedom in particular, but the best assurance of our future lies in advancing conditions in which freedom can live and grow, not in abandoning such essentials of freedom as we have already attained.

Another false argument is that since conscription has long been the rule in the continental countries, including those which remain democracies, we need not fear the effect of adopting it here. But the deeper I have gone into the study of war and the history of the past century, the further I have come towards the conclusion that the development of conscription has damaged the growth of the idea of freedom in the continental countries, and thereby damaged their efficiency, also—by undermining the sense of personal responsibility. There is only too much evidence that our temporary adoption of conscription in the last war had a permanent effect harmful to the development of freedom and democracy here. For my own part, I have come to my present conviction of the supreme importance of freedom through the pursuit of efficiency. I believe that freedom is the foundation of efficiency, both national and military. Thus it is a practical folly as well as a spiritual surrender to "go totalitarian" as a result of fighting for existence against the totalitarian States. Cut off the incentive to freely given service; and you dry up the life-source of a free community.

We ought to realize that it is easier to adopt the compulsory principle of national life than to shake it off. Once compulsion for personal service is adopted in peace-time, it will be hard to resist the extension of the principle to all other aspects of the nation's life, including freedom of thought, speech, and writing. We ought to think carefully, and to think ahead, before taking a decisive step

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

towards totalitarianism. Or are we so accustomed to our chains that we are no longer conscious of them?

### *Progress by Compulsion?*

It is only just to recognize that many of those who advocate such compulsory service are inspired by the desire that it should, and belief that it will, be a means to a good end. This view is one aspect of the larger idea that it is possible to *make* men good; that they must not only be shown the way to become better, but compelled to follow it. That idea has been held by many reformers, most revolutionaries, and all busybodies. It has persisted in generation after generation, although as repeatedly contradicted by the experience of history. It is closely related—cousin at least—to the dominant conception of the Nazi and Fascist movements.

While pointing out the analogy, and the fallacy, we should draw a distinction, however, between the positive and negative sides of the principle. The negative side comprises all laws which are framed to remove hindrances to progress and prevent interference by a selfish or naturally obstructive section of the community. It may be defined as a process of regulation, as contrasted with actual compulsion—which is, strictly, the positive process of forcing people to do some action against their will. Regulation, in the negative or protective sense of this definition, may be both necessary and helpful in promoting true progress. It does not infringe the principle of freedom, provided that it is wisely applied, for it is embraced in the corollary that freedom does not give license for interference with others' freedom. Moreover, it accords with the philosophical law of progress that the negative paves the way for the positive: that the best chance of ensuring a real step forward lies in taking care to avoid the mistakes that, in experience, have wrecked or distorted past attempts at progress.

At the same time history warns us that even in the negative regulatory sense, if much more in the positive compulsory sense, the effort to achieve progress by decree is apt to lead to reaction. The more hurried the effort, the greater the risk to its endurance. The

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

surest way of achieving progress is by generating and diffusing the *thought* of improvement. Reforms that last are those that come naturally, and with less friction, when men's minds have become ripe for them. A life spent in sowing a few grains of fruitful thought is a life spent more effectively than in hasty action that produces a crop of weeds. That leads us to see the difference, truly a vital difference, between influence and power.

### *The Desire for Power*

These reflections bring us back to the question of government. History shows that a main hindrance to real progress is the ever-popular myth of the "great man." While "greatness" may perhaps be used in a comparative sense, if even then referring more to particular qualities than to the embodied sum, the "great man" is a clay idol whose pedestal has been built by the natural human desire to look up to someone, but whose form has been carved by men who have not yet outgrown the desire to be regarded, or to picture themselves, as great men. No right system of government has yet been evolved because all, whether democracy or autocracy, are systems where rule is exercised by those who want power. The only hopeful system is rule by men who are truly cured of the lust of power. We have yet to try it.

In this connection, one would like to see a political movement that would offer a really original programme—which instead of announcing to the ever-credulous voter the wonderful things it would give him if elected to power, would tell him what checks it had designed on its own abuse of power.

Many of those who gain power under present systems have much that is good in them. Few are without some good in them. But to keep their power it is easier, and seems safer, to appeal to the lowest common denominator of the people—to instinct rather than to reason, to interest rather than to right, to expediency rather than to principle. It sounds practical, and may thus command respect where to speak of ideals might only arouse distrust. But in practice there is nothing more difficult than to discover where

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

expediency lies—it is apt to lead from one expedient to another, in a vicious circle through endless knots. Good intentions are common enough in that pursuit, but merely pave the way into a hellish tangle. That was proved in the years that led to 1914, and again in the years that led to 1939.

### *The Shortsightedness of Expediency*

We learn from history that expediency has rarely proved expedient. Yet today perhaps more than ever the statesmen of all countries talk the language of expediency—almost as if they are afraid to label themselves “unpractical” by referring to principles. They are especially fond of emphasizing the need for “realism.” This attitude would be sound if it implied a sense of the lessons really taught by history. It is unrealistic, for example, to underrate the force of idealism. It is unrealistic, also, to ignore military principles and conditions in taking political steps or making promises. And realism should be combined with foresight—to see one or two moves ahead. The strength of British policy has been its adaptability to circumstances as they arise; its weakness, that the circumstances (which are usually difficulties) could have been forestalled through forethought.

A reflection suggested by the last hundred years of history, especially the history of our affairs in the Mediterranean, is that British policy has been best, not only in spirit but in effect, when it has come nearest to being honest.

The counter-pull of Britain's moral impulses and material interests produced an amazing series of somersaults in British relations with Turkey. We repeatedly sought to cultivate the Sultan as a counterpoise to French or Russian ambitions in the Near East, and as often were driven to take action against him, because his behaviour to his subjects shocked our sense of justice as well as our sentiments. In the light of those hundred years of history and their sequel, the use of our national gift for compromise may not seem altogether happy. Such delicate adjustment, to be truly effective, requires a Machiavelli—and the Englishman is not Machiavellian. He can never rid himself



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

of moral scruples sufficiently to fill the part. Thus he is always and inevitably handicapped in an a-moral competition, whether in duplicity or blood-and-iron. Realization of this inherent "weakness" suggests that Britain might find it better to be more consistently moral. At any rate the experiment has yet to be tried. On the other hand, there is plenty of experience to show the dilemmas and dangers into which Britain's maladjustment of morality and materialism has landed her. While we complacently counted on the Turks' gratitude, they did not forget the unreliability of our attitude. And by throwing the weight of our influence on the side of the Sultan and his effete Palace clique against the movement of the young Turks towards reform, we not only forfeited our influence in restraining their excesses, but cold-shouldered them into the embrace of Germany.

An even more recent lesson has been provided by the record of our diplomatic dealings with Italy during the past decade. In the cooler atmosphere of historical reflection, we may realize how easily Mussolini may have mistaken our attitude to his purposes, and come to feel some degree of sympathy with that keen pickpocket but reluctant combatant.

How differently the affairs of the world would go—with a little more decency, a little more honesty, a little more thought! Thinking, above all—to see a few moves ahead, and realize the dangers of condoning evil. We try to play the old diplomatic game, yet cannot hope to play it successfully—because we have acquired scruples from which the old-style exponent of *real-politik* is free, not yet having grown-up as far.

Our opportunism is valuable—so far as it means adaptability; but harmful, so far as it only means short-sight. We are selfish—but enlightened selfishness would be to take well-judged risks for the sake of long-term security. We hesitated to do this, saying that the people would not support it. But wouldn't they? if a Government, especially a "National Government," had been bold enough to put it to them. As it was, we drifted from one predicament into another.

One can understand the point of view of the man who goes in for unabashed "piracy"—and seeks his own profit regardless of others.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

He may draw his profit, although unconsciously his loss far exceeds it—because he is deadening his own soul. But one cannot see sense, even of so short-sighted a kind, in those who maintain any standards of decency in private life yet advocate, or at least countenance, the law of the jungle in public and international affairs. More illogical still are those who talk of patriotic self-sacrifice, and of its spiritual sublimity, while preaching pure selfishness in world affairs. What is the use of anyone sacrificing himself to preserve the country unless in the hope, and with the idea, of providing a chance to continue its spiritual progress—towards becoming a better country? Otherwise he is merely helping to preserve the husk—saving the form but not the soul. Only a *perverse* patriotism is capable of such hopeless folly.

### *The Importance of Keeping Promises Promptly*

Civilization is built on the practice of keeping promises. It may not sound a high attainment, but if trust in its observance be shaken the whole structure cracks and sinks. Any constructive effort and all human relations, personal, political, and commercial, depend on being able to depend on promises.

This truth has a reflection on the question of collective security among nations, and on the latest lesson of history in regard to that subject. In the years before the war, the charge was constantly brought that its supporters were courting the risk of war by their exaggerated respect for covenants. Although they may have been fools in disregarding the conditions necessary for the effective fulfilment of pledges, they at least showed themselves men of honour, and in a long view, of more fundamental commonsense than those who argued that we should give aggressors a free hand so long as they left us alone. History has shown, repeatedly, that the hope of buying safety in this way is the greatest of delusions. Too many grown-up Englishmen, however, retained the schoolboy instinct to keep on good terms with the bully, without learning from schoolboys' experience that no bully was ever pacified by servile wooing.

What is the value of patriotism if it means no more than a cat's devotion to its own fireside, rather than to human beings? And, like the cat, such a "patriot" is apt to get burnt when the house catches fire.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

### *The Importance of Care about Making Promises and being able to Meet them Promptly*

It is immoral to make promises that one cannot in practice fulfil—in the sense that the recipient expects. On that ground, in 1939, I questioned the underlying morality of the Polish Guarantee, as well as its practicality. If the Poles had realized the military inability of Britain and France to save them from defeat, and of what such defeat would mean to them individually and collectively, it is unlikely that they would have shown such stubborn opposition to Germany's originally modest demands—for Danzig and a passage through the Corridor. Since it was obvious to me that they were bound to lose these points, and much more in the event of a conflict, it seemed to me wrong on our part to make promises that were bound to encourage false hopes.

It also seemed to me that any such promises were the most certain way to produce war—because of the inevitable provocative-ness of guaranteeing, at such a moment of tension, an area which we had hitherto treated as outside our sphere of interest; because of the manifest temptation which that guarantee offered, to a military-minded people like the Germans, to show how fatuously impractical our guarantee was; and because of its natural effect in stiffening the attitude of a people, the Poles, who had always shown themselves exceptionally intractable in negotiating a reasonable settlement of any issue.

An historian could not help seeing certain parallels between the long-standing aspects of the Polish-German situation, and that between Britain and the Boer Republics forty years earlier—and remembering the effect on us of the attempts of the other European Powers to induce or coerce us into negotiating a settlement with the Boers. If our own reaction then had been so violent, it could hardly be expected that the reaction of a nation filled with an even more bellicose spirit would be less violent—especially as the attempt to compel negotiation was backed by an actual promise of making war if Poland felt moved to resist the German conditions.

Yet in the debate in Parliament on the Polish Guarantee, April,

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

1939, the keynote of almost all the leading speakers was that they supported the Guarantee in the belief that it would be a means of preserving peace. From an historical point of view, that self-confession of their own state of delusion was the clearest evidence of their lack of the elements of practical statesmanship, and their unfitness to be in charge of a great people's fate. The one prominent exception to this rule of fatuity was Mr. Lloyd George, who alone pointed out the practical difficulties and the dangerous folly of offering such a pledge without first securing Russia's adhesion. By the irony of history he was at this crucial moment for once in accord with the view of the military authorities—and, indeed, of anyone who had the slightest grasp of the practical conditions. He was also the only statesman whose voice was in tune with the traditions of British statesmanship.

It is worth recalling that Gladstone, than whom no one was more emphatic in condemning aggression, defined, for Queen Victoria's enlightenment, a series of guiding principles for British foreign policy, when he first became Prime Minister in 1869. The circumstances then, before collective security had been organized, were broadly similar to those of 1939, when it had been in effect dissolved.

Among the introductory remarks he said—"Though Europe never saw England faint away, we know at what cost of internal danger to all the institutions of the country she fought her way to the perilous eminence on which she undoubtedly stood in 1815. . . . Is England so uplifted in strength above every other nation that she can with prudence advertise herself as ready to undertake the general redress of wrongs? Would not the consequences of such professions and promises be either the premature exhaustion of her means, or a collapse in the day of performance?"

The principles he laid down were—"That England should keep entire in her own hands the means of estimating her own obligations; . . . that she should not narrow her own liberty of choice by declarations made to other Powers . . . of which they would claim to be at least joint interpreters; . . . that, come what may, it is better for her to promise too little than too much; that she should

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

not encourage the weak by giving expectations of aid to resist the strong, but should rather seek to deter the strong by firm but moderate language, from aggressions on the weak."

### *The Precipitation and Spread of War*

The British Government's Guarantee to Poland flew in the face of all these principles. Furthermore, there was an accompaniment which transgressed the last clause. One speaker in the debate remarked it, and his warning deserved more attention than it received. This was contained in Maxton's words of caution—"Since Munich the mood of the nation has been one of exasperation, but I do not think we should go to war about exasperation; because we feel in a bad temper at the moment." These reflections struck me the more because they coincided with my own impressions, as recorded in successive diary notes that I made then and during the next six months. For years I had been trying to awaken people to a sense of the dangers in store if they did not make a stand in time, while there was firm strategic ground on which to stand; from March 1939 onwards I found myself in the paradoxical position of trying to put the brake on a mood of exasperation that took no account of realities. Some of the most bellicose utterances came from former appeasers.

In the circumstances produced by our guarantee to Poland, their tone was too much akin to the schoolboy's way of "daring" another to strike—always the most certain way of provoking a blow. One particularly striking example was a speech made by a prominent member of the House of Lords, who was also a great industrialist. After affirming his loyalty to the Prime Minister's policy, he remarked: "Mr. Chamberlain is trying to obviate bloodshed. Otherwise I would like to see a war tomorrow." He went on to say that we were much better prepared than in 1914—a statement which, relative to the conditions, was quite untrue. And he was in a position where he had reason to know better. In assessing the contributory causes of the war, the future historian will have to take account of such provocative utterances.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Now, when the practical absurdity of the Polish Guarantee is better appreciated than it was at the time, it is commonly excused, or justified, by the argument that it marked the point at which the British Government declared: "We were blind, but now we see." I have too many recollections, and records of discussions during that period, to be able to accept the view that this sudden change of policy was due to a sudden awakening—to the moral issues. I had for too long listened to cool and subtly-calculating arguments—for allowing Germany to expand eastwards, for evading our obligations under the League Covenant, and for leaving others to bear the brunt of any early stand against aggression.

These "calculating" arguments had seemed to me as militarily miscalculated as they were morally shocking: in their would-be Machiavellianism. I had, for years, encountered the same blandly a-moral attitude in regard to the aggressions of Japan and Italy. In brief, I have been too long and too close an observer of contemporary history to have any illusions left about the moral basis of our foreign policy. When anyone tells me that we suddenly came to see, in April 1939, the threat that the Nazi system carried to a civilized way of life, I can only smile, sadly. What I observed, and made historical note of, in the months following Munich, was a growing resentment of the humiliation we had there suffered, and a growing fear of the danger to our interests—a compound which gathered momentum, as under the pressure of expanding gases, after the events of March 1939.

A powerful contributory factor was that all those in power who had expressed complacent satisfaction over the Munich Settlement were made to look silly, with consequent damage to their political reputation. Such a reaction was most plainly perceptible in the case of Chamberlain himself. The dangerous consequence was that those who had previously been blind to the danger now became *blinded* by their own passionate compound of indignation and pugnacity—that underlying pugnacity, which, as our history amply shows, is a very strong national characteristic, once aroused. Without discounting the influence of the strong moral sense that was shown among sections of our people, if not among their rulers, during the

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

years prior to 1939, my own observations progressively convinced me that any true history of the course of our policy from the spring of 1939 onwards would have to give full weight to the factor of pugnacity.

The inherently war-provoking effect of the Polish Guarantee was inevitably increased by another step we took, at home, only a few weeks later. This was the introduction of conscription. When a Bill for Conscription was introduced in Parliament in 1909, as a result of Lord Roberts's campaign, our General Staff, while favourable to the idea in principle, advised against it on two grounds—(i) that it would for a time impair the efficiency and readiness for war of the Regular Army; (ii) that this temporary weakness on our part, combined with the prospect that we should eventually have an army that would change the military balance in Europe, would be a temptation to Germany to lose no time in launching a war. The General Staff expressed the view "that, were they in the position of the Great General Staff of Germany, they would strike at once." That *sans* was confirmed by Kuhlmann, the former German Foreign Minister, some years after the war. So it would hardly be surprising if our sudden introduction of Conscription a few weeks after the Polish Guarantee, had a similar effect in 1939 to what it would have had in 1909. The British people and their leaders are so politically-minded that they seem to be quite incapable of grasping the natural workings of the military mind abroad in the matter of foreign relations.

What would have happened if we had not committed ourselves to the support of Poland? The usual answer is contained in this typical assertion—"We must have slipped inevitably under German influence and control, and forfeited any possible claim to the respect of every other country." The latter point is related, obviously, to the question already discussed as to the value of making promises that we cannot fulfil, and bringing misery on the masses of people who were unwise enough to trust in our power to preserve them. In any case, the claim that our action earned the respect of other countries is not borne out by the balance of evidence as to the actual impression that was made in other countries, even those most sympathetic to

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

us, by the outcome of our Guarantee to Poland. It was a common remark, during the winter of 1939-40, that they did not know which was the more to be feared—the "protection" of Germany, or the "support" of Britain. As for the former point, two questions are involved—whether (a) our own spirit of resistance would have weakened if we had not fought over Poland; (b) further prospects of European resistance to Hitler would have disappeared if war had been postponed.

While I had some doubts previous to Munich of the psychological effect of repeated retreats on our own people, they were dispelled by the reaction to Munich—henceforth my anxiety was only on strategic grounds. There could be no mistaking the bracing effect of the shock of Munich. Any further compromise would only have strengthened their resolution. Indeed, it might have had a better effect at home than did our actual declaration of war—which encouraged us to sink back into complacency and lethargy, relying too much on the quite unhistorical notion that "Britain has always lost every battle save the last."

More important is the question of what would have happened in Europe if we had not committed ourselves to the Polish Guarantee. How would our restraint have affected the strategic balance? If we had not given that delusory guarantee, Poland would have been forced to accept Russia's help, as the only chance of withstanding German pressure. And Russia would have been forced to give Poland such support, because of her then existing value as a buffer-State, and as an auxiliary army. In these circumstances, it would have been much *less likely* that Germany would have attacked Poland than it was when an isolated Poland depended merely on an illusory promise of help from the Western Powers, and Russia had been temporarily bought off. And if Germany had none the less embarked on her "March to the East," we and the French together would have had the power of intervening in far more favourable conditions than we actually did—of ensuring that there was a real, simultaneous, two-front combination of pressure upon Germany.

The ill-consequences of that spurious guarantee did not end with the downfall of Poland. For this meant that henceforth Britain and



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

France were committed to an offensive undertaking which they had no practical prospect of executing. Their consciousness of incapacity to force the "west wall" led them, even more foolishly, to dream and talk of "opening up the war," and finding an avenue to Germany's flanks through some neutral country. The more we talked of what we might do in this way, the more certainly we ensured that Hitler would be moved to forestall us.

The most elementary understanding of psychology in general, and of Hitler's psychology in particular, should have warned us as to the natural effect of such "offensive" talk. A natural result was to *precipitate* German intervention in Scandinavia and the Low Countries in turn—from which followed the fall of France. And, in the same way, we fatuously produced German intervention in the Balkans which, as we had ourselves recognized, Hitler was chary of undertaking. The responsibility for the consequent misery that has befallen the peoples of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia and Greece, in turn, thus lies heavily upon us—for losing the sense of military realities.

While there can be no doubt of Nazi Germany's appetite for gain, a student of strategy can appreciate how at every turn our tentative moves tempted her to forestall us—in Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and the Balkans. Mr. Churchill himself, expressing strategic gratification—if miscalculation—on the first news of the German move, spoke of it as having been "provoked." In a similar way, we have since been prompted to forestall her—in Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Africa. That kind of process constantly repeats itself in the history of war.

By forcing the pace, before we were capable of maintaining it, we repeatedly gave the Germans both an incentive and a chance to increase their lead. A characteristic of Hitler's had been his strong sense of caution—in never making a move until he had good reason to estimate that it would succeed. That caution on his part might have turned into a potential asset for us, if we had been equally cautious about showing our hand, while doing all we could to develop our strength. Instead, we were hasty where we should have been cautious, and sluggish where we should have shown a sense of haste.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

History, however, may perhaps decide that our misjudgment led to Hitler's greater misjudgment later, loosening his sense of caution, and leading him to dissipate his balance of force in the ruinous Russian gamble. But his anti-Communist prejudice, so deep-rooted as to become a complex, may have been a more decisive factor.

Everybody can see now—though very few did at the time—that the war held no possibility of victory for us until Hitler committed this fatal mistake. In other words, the policy we were pursuing committed us to progressive exhaustion entailing the probability of ultimate collapse. Avoidance of that fate was not due to the men who were responsible for Britain's policy, and for the British people. Indeed, early in 1940 they had wanted to cut the rope that saved them in 1941—by striking a blow at Soviet Russia that would have entangled them in war with the forces of Russia and Germany combined. In that suicidal purpose they were prompted as much by a deluded conception of its strategic advantages as by emotional sympathy with Finland, and even more by an emotional antipathy to the Soviet. It was only due to Finland's sudden collapse that this fatal blunder was averted, our expedition forestalled, and the saving chance preserved of Hitler making his fatal blunder.

### *The Germs of War*

Such pitfalls of policy are closely related to the causes of war itself. Sympathies and antipathies, interests and loyalties, cloud the vision. And this kind of short-sight is apt to produce short temper.

As a light on the processes by which wars are manufactured and detonated, there is nothing more illuminating than a study of the fifty years of history preceding 1914. The vital influences are to be detected, not in the formal documents compiled by rulers, ministers and generals, but in their marginal notes and verbal asides. Here are revealed their instinctive prejudices, lack of interest in truth for its own sake, and indifference to the exactness of statement and reception which is a safeguard against dangerous misunderstandings.

I have come to think that accuracy, in the deepest sense, is the basic virtue—the foundation of understanding, supporting the

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

promise of progress. The cause of most troubles can be traced to excess; the failure to check them, to deficiency; their prevention lies in moderation. So in the case of troubles that develop from spoken or written communication, their cause can be traced to overstatement; their maintenance, to understatement; while their prevention lies in exact statement. It applies to private as well as to public life. Sweeping judgments, malicious gossip, inaccurate statements which spread a misleading impression—these are symptoms of the moral and mental recklessness that gives rise to war. Studying their effect, one is led to see that the germs of war lie within ourselves—not in economics, politics, or religion as such. How can we hope to rid the world of war until we have cured ourselves of the originating causes?

### *How the Germs Work*

These germs are most virulent among those who direct the affairs of nations. The atmosphere of power, and activity in the pursuit of power, inflame them. The way they work can be clearly traced in examining the origins and course of the last war. While economic factors formed a predisposing cause, the deeper and more decisive factors lay in human nature—its possessiveness, competitiveness, vanity, and pugnacity, all of which were fomented by the dishonesty which breeds inaccuracy.

Throughout the twenty-five years preceding that war, one of the most significant symptoms can be seen in the Kaiser's vanity, and the effect on it of his curiously mingled affection and jealousy towards England. Understanding of his composition enables us to see how his worst tendencies were often sharpened by the snubs that Edward VII was disposed to administer to a nephew whom he regarded as a bounder.

When one comes to the fateful weeks preceding the outbreak of war, one sees how great was the part played in the Governments of both Austria and Russia by resentment at past humiliations, and the fear of any fresh "loss of face." Both of those governments, and their foreign ministers in particular, were all too ready to bring misery

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

upon millions rather than swallow their injured pride. And in the crucial opening phase of the crisis, the Austrian Government was prompted to take up a position from which it could not easily climb down, by the encouragement which the Kaiser gave it to take vigorous action.

The irony of history, and the absurdity of the factors that determine it, was never more clearly shown than at that moment. The crisis arose out of the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by a handful of young Slavs, who had sought and received help from a Serbian secret society known as the "Black Hand." They murdered the one man of influence in Austria who was potentially their friend, and might have fulfilled their hopes. The Austrian Government, while quite pleased at his removal, used it as an excuse for curbing Serbia. The Kaiser's initial support of their high-handed treatment of Serbia seems to have been inspired by his royal indignation that royal blood should have been shed, together with his fear that if he advised moderation he would be reproached with weakness. When he saw war actually in sight he tried to back down—but it was then too late. And the Austrian Government, in turn, was afraid that if it showed hesitation it might subsequently forfeit Germany's support. So it hastily declared war on Serbia, regardless of the risks of bringing on a general war.

The threat to Serbia was an affront to Russia, whose Government regarded that Slav country as its protégé. Having been already assured of France's support, the Russian Government now decided to mobilize its forces on the Austrian frontier. But the military then intervened with the argument that it was technically impracticable to carry out such a partial mobilization, and they insisted on a general mobilization—embracing the German frontier also.

The military, with their "military reasons," now to all intents took charge everywhere. The German General Staff, which had been privately inciting the Austrian General Staff to exploit the situation, was now able to use the Russian mobilization as a means to overcome the Kaiser's belated caution. Arguing that the military situation was more favourable than it might be later, they succeeded in securing a declaration of war against Russia. That in turn involved

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

war with France—not merely because France was Russia's ally, but because the German military plan had been framed to meet the case of war with both countries simultaneously, and was so inflexible in design that it could not be modified without disrupting it. So, despite the feeble protests of the Kaiser and his chancellor, war was declared on France as well as on Russia. As the long-standing German military plan had been designed to circumvent the French frontier fortresses by going through Belgium, the violation of her neutrality involved Britain, as one of its guarantors—cutting the "Gordian knot" of the tangle into which we had got by exchanging our traditional policy of isolation for a semi-detached arrangement with France that was, in turn, complicated by the way the General Staff had made detailed transport arrangements with the French General Staff behind the Cabinet's back.

The way we were drawn stumblingly into war was, on our side, a striking example of the drawbacks of entering into vague commitments without thinking out the implications and the military problems. It was, on the other side, a glaring example of the folly of allowing the purely military mind to frame hard-and-fast plans, on technical grounds, without regard to wider considerations—political, economic, and moral. As a result, when the original military plan went wrong, Germany found herself in a hole from which she could not extricate herself.

Similar influences wrecked every good chance of bringing the war to an end, on satisfactory terms, before all the countries were exhausted. In 1917, the peace party in Germany gained an ascendancy over the Kaiser and were prepared not only to withdraw from all the conquered territory, but actually to cede all but a fraction of Alsace-Lorraine to France—in other words, to give her as much as she actually gained in the end, without further sacrifice of life. As was later disclosed by Lord Esher, King George V's intimate adviser, the prospect was frustrated, and the British Government kept in the dark about it, by M. Ribot's petty-minded resentment that the approach had been made through M. Briand. "The underlying motive was jealousy on the part of the (French) Foreign Minister and Foreign Office." When the facts subsequently became

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

known, they caused the fall of M. Ribot. But by that time the Kaiser had been thrown back into the arms of the war party, by the repulse of the offer.

Similarly, when the new Emperor of Austria tried to break away from Germany and make peace, his advance was rebuffed and a splendid opportunity lost—because it ran contrary to the inordinate ambitions of Signor Sonnino, the Italian Foreign Minister, and those of M. Poincaré in France. The overture was hidden both from our Government and the American, and was skilfully wrecked by the mean expedient of letting the Germans know what the Austrian Emperor was proposing, thus giving him away to his unwanted partner.

On that side, the personal wrangles and wire-pulling were just as common and constant. Nothing more illuminating has been written than the reflection to which General Hoffmann, perhaps the ablest brain in the German Higher Command, was brought by his experience of watching the tug-of-war between the Falkenhayn faction and the Hindenburg-Ludendorff faction. His reflection is worth quoting:

"When one gets a close view of influential people—their bad relations with each other, their conflicting ambitions, all the slander and the hatred—one must always bear in mind that it is certainly much worse on the other side, among the French, English, and Russians, or one might well be nervous. . . . The race for power and personal position seems to destroy all men's characters. I believe that the only creature who can keep his honour is a man living on his own estate; he has no need to intrigue and struggle—for it is no good intriguing for fine weather."

Any history of war which treats only of its strategic and political course is merely a picture of the surface. The personal currents run deeper, and may have a deeper influence on the outcome. Well might Hoffmann remark: "For the first time in my life I have seen 'History' at close quarters, and I now know that its actual process is very different to what is presented to posterity."

## . Why Don't We Learn From History?

### *The Aftermath of War*

We learn from history that war breeds war. That is natural. The atmosphere of war stimulates all varieties of the bellicose bacilli, and these tend to find favourable conditions in the aftermath—in what, with unconscious irony, is usually described as the restoration of peace. Conditions are especially favourable to their renewal in the aftermath of a long and exhausting war, and most of all in a war which ends with the appearance of a definite victory for one of the belligerent sides. For then, those who belong to the defeated side naturally tend to put the blame for all their troubles upon the victors, and thus upon the simple fact of defeat instead of upon their own folly. They feel that if they had won, they would have avoided any ill-effects.

These consequences and conditions can be clearly observed in examining the aftermath of 1914-1918, a more than usually bitter and exhausting war. Moreover, since the people were more fully engaged in the war than ever before, while the proportion killed off was not really large in proportion to the total engaged, all the countries were left with an unusually large proportion of abnormally bellicose men—in whom the impulse to violence had become hypertrophied by licence for violence. In this country they provided a disturbing problem, and might have proved a worse one if an outlet had not been provided for them in Ireland. Naturally, they presented a much larger problem in Germany, a country that was not only defeated but inherently more militaristic. It is significant how many of the original Nazis, like many of the "Black and Tans," were war-strained neurotics, while strikingly similar in type and disposition.

### *The Illusion of Victory*

We learn from history that complete victory has never been completed by the result that the victors always anticipate—a good and lasting peace. For victory has always sown the seeds of a fresh war; because victory breeds among the vanquished a desire for

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

vindication and vengeance, and because victory raises fresh rivals. In the case of a victory gained by an alliance, the most common case, this is a most common sequel. It seems to be the natural result of the removal of a strong third-party check.

The first lesson has always been recognized when passions cool. The second is not so obvious, so that it may be worth amplification. A too complete victory inevitably complicates the problem of making a just and wise peace settlement. Where there is no longer the counter-balance of an opposing force to control the appetites of the victors, there is no check on the conflict of views and interests between the parties to the alliance. The divergence is then apt to become so acute as to turn the comradeship of common danger into the hostility of mutual dissatisfaction—so that the ally of one war becomes the enemy in the next.

These effects have been abundantly demonstrated in our own history. In the seventeenth century we broke the power of Spain with the help of the Dutch. Subsequently we fought three wars with the Dutch—and finally broke their power in alliance with the French. Within a generation we were drawn into a fresh series of coalition wars to curb the menacing power of France. After six of these wars, stretching over a century, we succeeded in breaking the power of France—in the most decisive victory we had ever attained. But our chief allies, Russia and Prussia, became in turn our chief dangers in the century that followed—together with the country that we had so completely vanquished.

In the Crimean War, we sought to cripple Russia's power in alliance with the French. Five years later we were faced with the threat of a French invasion of England. The danger was temporarily removed through the defeat of France in 1870 by Germany—with whom our sympathies then lay. Yet in the last decade of the nineteenth century we were, again, several times on the verge of war with France and Russia combined.

In the endeavour to counter that danger we unsuccessfully sought an alliance with Germany, and then made an alliance with Japan—as a makeweight to Russia in the Far East. This encouraged the Japanese to oppose Russian expansion there. Meantime we had come



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

to an agreement with France about respective spheres of influence in Africa—an agreement that developed in a way that we had not foreseen. For Russia's defeat by Japan weakened the check that the Franco-Russian alliance had placed on Germany's growing power. And our anxiety about this shift in the balance of power led us into closer association with France.

Thus, in 1914, when Austria clashed with Russia over their respective Balkan interests, and Germany backed her Austrian ally, while France backed her Russian ally, we were dragged into war through the way we had tied ourselves up with France. After four years' struggle, which left us more exhausted than ever before in our history, Germany and Austria were vanquished.

Within two years we were estranged from France over a conflict of interests in the Near East, and friction became so intense that only mutual exhaustion of the two great Powers confined the armed conflict to a second-hand war between their rival protégés. We were soon in ever deepening difficulties with our other allies of the Great War, Italy and Japan—whose appetites for expansion we had fostered. That friction gave Germany the chance to rearm—for revenge. And when, a generation later, in the attempt to check the renewed menace of Germany, we again got into war, Italy and Japan, our allies of the last war, became the principal confederates of our enemy.

Victory in the true sense implies that the state of peace, and of one's people, is better after the war than before. Victory in this sense is only possible if a quick result can be gained or if a long effort can be economically proportioned to the national resources. The end must be adjusted to the means. It is wiser to run risks of war for the sake of preserving peace than to run risks of exhaustion in war for the sake of finishing with victory—a conclusion that runs counter to custom but is supported by experience. Indeed, deepening study of past experience leads to the conclusion that nations might often have come nearer to their object by taking advantage of a lull in the struggle to discuss a settlement than by pursuing the war with the aim of "victory."

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Where the two sides are too evenly matched to offer a reasonable chance of early success to either, the statesman is wise who can learn something from the psychology of strategy. It is an elementary principle of strategy that, if you find your opponent in a strong position costly to force, you should leave him a line of retreat—as the quickest way of loosening his resistance. It should, equally, be a principle of policy, especially in war, to provide your opponent with a ladder by which he can climb down.

It is folly to imagine that the aggressive types, whether individuals or nations, can be bought off—or, in modern language, “appeased”—since the payment of *danegeld* stimulates a demand for more *danegeld*. But they can be curbed. Their very belief in force makes them more susceptible to the deterrent effect of a formidable opposing force. While it is hard to make a real peace with the predatory types, it is easier to induce them to accept a state of truce—and far less exhausting than an attempt to crush them, whereby they are, like all types of mankind, infused with the courage of desperation. The experience of history brings ample evidence that the downfall of civilized States tends to come, not from the direct assaults of foes, but from internal decay, combined with the consequences of exhaustion in war.

Peaceful nations are apt, however, to court unnecessary loss and danger because, when once aroused, they are more inclined to proceed to extremes than predatory nations. For the latter, making war as a means of gain, are usually more ready to call it off when they find an opponent too strong to be easily overcome. It is the reluctant fighter, impelled by emotion and not by calculation, who tends to press a fight to the bitter end. Thereby he too often defeats his own end. For the spirit of barbarism can be weakened only during a cessation of hostilities; war strengthens it—pouring fuel on the flames.

### *The Curtailing of War*

We learn from history that after any long war the survivors are apt to reach common agreement that there has been no real victor

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

but only common losers. That truth was enunciated as far back as 500 B.C. in the Chinese classic of Sun Tzu.

War is only profitable if victory is quickly gained. Only an aggressor can hope to gain a quick victory. If he is frustrated, the war is bound to be long, and mutually ruinous, unless it is brought to an end by mutual agreement.

Since an aggressor goes to war for gain, he is apt to be the more ready of the two sides to seek peace by agreement. The aggressed side is usually more inclined to seek vengeance through the pursuit of victory—even though all experience has shown that victory is a mirage in the desert created by a long war. This desire for vengeance is natural, but far-reachingly self-injurious. And even if it be fulfilled, it merely sets up a fresh cycle of revenge-seeking. Hence any wise statesman should be disposed to consider the possibility of ending the war by agreement as soon as it is clear that the war will otherwise be a prolonged one.

The side that has suffered aggression would be unwise to bid for peace, lest its bid be taken as a sign of weakness or fear. But it would be wise to listen to any bid that the enemy makes. Even if the initial proposals are not good enough, once an opposing Government has started bidding it is easily led to improve its offers. And this is the best way to loosen its hold on its troops and people, who naturally tend to desire peace—so long as they can regain it without being conquered—when they find that the prospect of a cheap victory is fading. By contrast, the will to fight always tends to become stronger among the people who have been attacked, so that it is easier to make them hold out in any negotiation for terms that are satisfying.

These broad lessons from the general experience of war through many centuries have a special point for the British people. First, because their long run of security and prosperity can be traced to the fact that they have usually ended their wars by agreement, instead of exhausting themselves in pursuit of victory as their successive Continental rivals have done in turn. Second, because as a people inhabiting a small island on the edge of the Continent, they have never possessed the capacity to conquer a great Continental

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Power. They have sent armies to the Continent forty-one times in the last one thousand years. Only twice have these ventures ended in a decisive victory; and on each of these occasions we have had an overwhelmingly strong combination of allies on our side. Even so, none of our wars has left us so exhausted. On the first occasion, in 1815, our recovery was helped by the fruits of the Industrial Revolution. On the second occasion, in 1918, our moral and material resources were drained to an extent that weakened our policy throughout the succeeding generation, and thus brought us into the present war in an enfeebled condition and most disadvantageous situation.

As an island nation, the record of a thousand years' experience shows that we have never possessed the capacity to conquer a great Continental Power, but only to prevent it defeating us and bend its will to conquest into a desire for peace. Our strength has lain in our "nuisance-value", not in our victory-talk. So long as our island base remained impregnable we have been able to prevent any opponent enjoying the fruits of his victories—thus bringing him to bid for peace.

### *The Illusion that the latest enemy is "Different"*

It is a recurrent illusion in history that the enemy of the time is essentially different, in the sense of being more evil, than any in the past. We, for example, felt that conviction when fighting Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when fighting the France of Louis XIV early in the eighteenth century, when fighting Revolutionary France at the end of that century, and also when fighting Napoleonic France in the early nineteenth century.

It is remarkable to see how not only the impression, but the phrases repeat themselves. And even historians are apt to lose their balance when they turn from the past to the problems of their own time. I was reminded of this by reading a remark made by that eminent historian Stubbs in 1860, when our fear of an invasion by Napoleon III gave birth to the ancestor of the Home Guard, the original Volunteer Force. Asking why "the English and the Germans

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

have always been the peaceloving nations of history" (an extremely unhistorical remark in both cases), Stubbs answered his own question—"Because France shows herself today as she has been throughout the course of a thousand years, aggressive, unscrupulous, false."

### *The Illusion of Treaties*

One of the clear lessons that history teaches is that no agreement between governments has had any stability beyond their recognition that it is in their own interests to continue to adhere to it. I cannot conceive that any serious student of history would be impressed by such a hollow phrase as "the sanctity of treaties." Facing the fact that international relations are governed by interests, and not by moral principles, it can be seen that the validity of treaties depends on mutual convenience. This can provide an effective guarantee. While there is no security in negotiating from weakness, there is a better prospect in any negotiation where it is clear that the strength of both sides is closely balanced. For in that case any settlement is based on a mutual recognition that the prospects of a one-sided victory would be incommensurate with the prospects of mutual exhaustion, and of the consequent subjection of both parties subsequently to the interests of third parties who are standing outside the struggle, or participating to only a limited extent.

That reflection likewise applies to the case of nations that are actually at war, and where the power that has taken the lead in making war makes a move towards restoring peace. As aggressive nations make war for gain, their appetite for the losses that a hard war brings is more easily quenched than that of a nation which fights because it feels its existence is endangered. A nation that fights for gain is also quicker to realize that it has got into a deeper hole than it bargained for, and is thus more responsive to the effect of the adage—"Once bitten, twice shy." This applies even more particularly to an aggressive Government which, if it is once forced to seek a way out of a war that has become too wearing, is faced with much greater difficulty in persuading its people that a renewal will pay adequately.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

A realization of this underlying check leads to a further reflection—that a fundamental mistake in the last war was to insist on the Kaiser's overthrow as a prelude to peace, and not to insist that Hindenburg negotiated the armistice. Thereby we enabled the military party not only to escape blame in the eyes of the next generation of their countrymen, but to make the peace party the scapegoats for the defeat. It was a lesson in elementary psychology by which we ought to profit, instead of chanting "no peace with Hitler" in the same way as we previously chanted "no peace with the Kaiser." But there is no sign that we have "learned from history." The demand for unconditional surrender, coupled with the cry for punishment of the war-guilty, inevitably impales policy on the horns of a dilemma, for in fact it implies that the opposing leaders have to be overthrown before their people can obtain peace, and if they are overthrown prior to an armistice it means that they are in effect enabled to escape the stigma of surrender.

The price of this escape may have to be paid by future generations. For the prospect of Hitler's overthrow carries the ominous possibility that in the place of the man will arise a legend, even more dangerous to civilization than the Napoleonic legend has proved—because Hitler has made more play than Napoleon with social reform, and has thus had more appeal to the masses. If post-war conditions should prove disappointing, the experience of history suggests the possibility that he may be pictured as the man who might have led the European masses into "a land flowing with milk and honey" had he not been first thwarted and then overthrown by jealous opponents and vested interests!

By contrast, where the leaders who have made war are driven to make peace, all the dissatisfaction that their people feel about the outcome tends to recoil on their heads. That is the surest way of ensuring their disposal while at the same time ensuring that the people will be indisposed to support any further war. In the light of experience, however, the chance of adopting any such reasoned policy is likely to be swamped by the surging passions of war.

No clear thinking is possible in a passion—any more than it is possible to see clearly through glasses that are covered with steam.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Emotion must be kept separate. Significantly, it is to be observed that many of the emotional pacifists of the 'twenties and 'thirties have become the most extreme "bitter-enders" of the early 'forties, reckless of all cost and consequence in their fervour for the enemy's downfall.

### *The Dilemma of the "Intellectual"*

An early consequence of war has been the development in this country of a widespread attack on what are called the "intellectuals." The parallel with the still earlier attack on this thinking element in the Fascist States is noteworthy, showing how easily the effect of fighting is to infect men with what they set out to fight against. The attack, however, gains force from the fact that it has a basis of reasonable justification. The Left Wing intellectuals played a large part in the pacifist movement, and in their fervour for peace many of them paid so little regard to the realities of military power that, in reverse, their "disarming" advocacy powerfully contributed to the prevention of our readiness to avert war. A consciousness of that may partly explain why since the war came some of them, on the rebound, have become such bellicose "fire-eaters."

The cause of such oscillation is largely emotional. Neither these intellectuals nor their critics appear to recognize the inherent dilemma of the thinking man, and its inevitability. The dilemma should be faced, for it is a natural part of the growth of any human mind.

An intellectual ought to realize the extent to which the world is shaped by human emotions, emotions uncontrolled by reason—his thinking must have been shallow, and his observation narrow, if he fails to realize that. But having once learnt to think, and to use reason as a guide, he cannot possibly float with the current of popular emotion, and fluctuate with its violent changes—unless he himself ceases to think, or is deliberately false to his own thought. And in the latter case it is likely that he will commit intellectual suicide, gradually, "by the death of a thousand cuts."

A deeper diagnosis of the malady from which the Left Wing intellectuals have suffered in the past decade, and more, might

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

suggest that their troubles have come, not from following reason too far, but from not following it far enough—to realize the general power of unreason. Many of them, also, seem to have suffered from failing to apply reason internally as well as externally—through not using it for the control of their own emotions. In that way, they unwittingly helped to get this country into the mess of the present war, and then found themselves in an intellectual mess as a result.

In one of the more penetrating criticisms written on this subject, Mr. George Orwell expressed a profound truth in saying that "the energy that actually shapes the world springs from emotions." He referred to the deep-seated and dynamic power of "racial pride, leader-worship, religious belief, love of war." But there are *powerful* emotions beyond these. The energy of the intellectual himself springs from an emotion—love of truth: the desire for wider knowledge and understanding. That emotion has done quite a lot to shape the world, as a study of world history amply shows. In the thinking man, that source of energy only dries up when he ceases to believe in the guiding power of thought, and allows himself to become merely a vehicle for the prevailing popular emotions of the moment.

### *The Problem of Force*

The more I have reflected on the experience of history the more I have come to see the instability of solutions achieved by force, and to suspect even those instances where force has had the appearance of resolving difficulties. But the question remains whether we can afford to eliminate force in the world as it is without risking the loss of such ground as reason has gained. Beyond this is the doubt whether we should be able to eliminate it, even if we had the strength of mind to take such a risk. For weaker minds will cling to this protection, and by so doing spoil the possible effectiveness of non-resistance. Is there any way out of the dilemma? There is at least one solution that has yet to be tried—that the masters of force should be those who have mastered all desire to employ it. That solution is an extension of what Bernard Shaw expressed in *Major Barbara* thirty-three years ago: that wars would continue until the makers of gun-



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

powder became professors of Greek—and he here had Gilbert Murray in mind—or the professors of Greek became the makers of gunpowder. And this, in turn, was derived from Plato's conclusion that the affairs of mankind would never go right until either the rulers became philosophers or the philosophers became the rulers. If armed force were controlled by men who have become convinced of the wrongness of using force there would be the nearest approach to a safe assurance against its abuse. Such men might also come closest to efficiency in its use, should the enemies of civilization compel this. For the more complex that war becomes the more its efficient direction depends on understanding its properties and effects; and the deeper the study of modern war is carried the stronger grows the conviction of its futility. It is significant that the leaders of 1914-18 who showed this conviction most strongly afterwards were those who, in an historical survey, would be picked out as having learnt most during the course of the war. It is true, however, that they reached that conviction *afterwards*, and after their active careers were over.

### *The Problem of Limiting Force*

Experience shows that a basic flaw, though not the most obvious one, in any scheme of international security or disarmament, has been the difficulty of reconciling the views of the expert advisers. Conferences have repeatedly been spun out by the technical pulls and counter-pulls, until the prospect of agreement wore thin and the political temper became frayed. That is hardly surprising. It is not the business of a War Office to study war—but merely to prepare the instruments of war. And as all those who work in or under a War Office depend for their livelihood on the existence of war, they can hardly be expected to view it objectively, or to seek the means to its abolition.

To take the opinion of generals, admirals, or air marshals on the deeper problems of war, as distinct from its executive technique, is like consulting your local chemist about the treatment of a deep-seated disease. However skilled in compounding drugs it is not their

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

concern to study the causes and consequences of the disease, nor the psychology of the sufferer.

### *The Problem of a World Order*

The friction that commonly develops in any alliance system, especially when it has no balancing force, has been one of the factors that have fostered the numerous attempts throughout history to find a solution in fusion. But history teaches us that in practice this is apt to mean domination by one of the constituent elements. And the usual result of forcing the pace of the natural tendency towards the fusion of small groups in larger ones is the confusion of the plans to establish such a comprehensive political unit.

Moreover, regrettable as it may seem to the idealist, the experience of history provides little warrant for the belief that real progress, and the freedom that makes progress possible, lies in unification. For where unification has been able to establish unity of ideas it has usually ended in uniformity, paralysing the growth of new ideas. And where the unification has merely brought about an artificial or imposed unity, its irksomeness has led through discord to disruption.

Vitality springs from diversity—which makes for real progress so long as there is mutual toleration, based on the recognition that worse may come from an attempt to suppress differences than from acceptance of them. For this reason, the kind of peace that makes progress possible is best assured by the mutual checks created by a balance of forces—alike in the sphere of internal politics and of international relations. In the former sphere, the experience of the two-party system in English politics continued long enough to show its practical superiority, whatever its theoretical drawbacks, to any other system of government that has yet been tried. In the international sphere, the "balance of power" was a sound theory so long as the balance was preserved. But the frequency with which the European "balance of power" has become unbalanced, thereby precipitating war, has produced a growing urge to find a more stable solution, either by fusion or federation. Federation is the more hopeful method, since it embodies the life-giving principle of co-operation, whereas unification represents the principle of monopoly.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

And any monopoly of power leads to ever-repeated demonstration of the historical truth epitomized in Lord Acton's famous dictum—"All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." From that danger even a federation is not immune, so that the greatest care should be taken to ensure the mutual checks and balancing factors necessary to correct the natural effect of constitutional unity.

### *The Problem of Religion and World Order*

Many thoughtful leaders of the Church have emphasized that world order needs a moral basis, and that the hope of creating it depends on the growth of spiritual community. Any thoughtful man will agree with that argument. At the same time they have not failed to see that the separation of the Churches is inherently a hindrance to a common moral effort, and they have shown a growing desire for Christian reunion as a means towards "the achievement of unity in Christian effort." They have urged the possibility of attaining a co-operative degree of reunion, elastic not rigid, by adopting the principle of "unity with variety"—which is a profound truth and yet the clearest common sense.

It can be seen that these are two converging lines of thought. World conditions, and humanity's needs, clearly impel in the religious sphere the same movement towards co-operation and community that they are producing in the economic and political spheres. But the movement should not stop at the point of Christian community, establishing a closed frontier, with inter-communication limited by the Church's consular visas and custom permits. I cannot see the moral and spiritual justification for that restriction, nor its practical wisdom.

There are great forces growing in the world (a world now only a few days wide in flying space-time) that lie beyond the borders of nominally Christian Europe, and as urgently require to be brought into spiritual harmony with the West, if humanity is to avoid a clash more devastating even than the present one. It is beyond any reasonable hope that the Christian faith, even if its own disunity can be cured, could permeate all these peoples within a measurable time. There is room for diversity, but no room for discord.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

If that is to be prevented, the federation of the Christian Churches needs to be accompanied by a movement towards confederation, at least, with the other great world faiths. If it is demanded of the different Christian sects that they should drop their strife-generating claims to a monopoly of Christian truth, it would also seem to be demanded that Christianity itself should modify its underlying claims to a monopoly of religious truth. Belief in such a monopoly cannot avoid being a hindrance to the co-operation of the good forces, and their combination to meet the evil forces in this narrowing world. "Unity with variety" is the guiding principle, and a world-wide principle.

It is now becoming recognized that the various Christian Churches have tended to accentuate their doctrinal differences disproportionately to their common basis. Is it not timely to ask whether Christians as a whole have overemphasized and overestimated their separateness from all other religions and philosophies? For my own part, I feel greatly indebted to what I have learnt from others—particularly from Buddhist, Hindu, and Confucian teachings—in the search for truth and understanding. Study of them has enhanced my appreciation of Christian truth. The value of the Christian gospels as a guide to life has been amplified by the contribution provided by other gospels. It would have been limited if one's sources of light had been limited to Christian doctrine. The longer I have thought on the subject the more I have been impressed by, and become aware of, the fundamental unity-in-goodness of all these varied upward paths. Their appearance of diversity tends to disappear as one climbs above the clouds of controversy that hang round the lower slopes. The potential value of the convergence has also become clearer in the course of reaching a wider historical view. And its point is pressed by world conditions.

This leads to a further reflection. The civic idea of exclusive rights is born of a belief in superior rightness. It is predominantly a Western conception. While developing with the growth of nationalism, it was fostered by Christianity's claim to exclusive rightness in regard to religious truth. Its effect was manifested in the Crusaders, and later in the seventeenth century wars of religion between the

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

Christian sects. That claim underlies the whole story of the evolution of the Christian religion *since* Christ. For if there is one point clear from the story of Christ as contained in the gospels it is that he diverged from the Judaistic claim to exclusiveness of salvation, as "the chosen people." Nevertheless, the Church that was founded in his name reverted to the fundamental possessiveness of Judaism—which contrasts so markedly with the Buddhist spirit of tolerance. While Christianity has in many ways more affinity with Buddhism than with Judaism, it followed the latter in this vital respect. From this it gained dynamism, but lost universalism.

The consequences have been far-reaching. By following this line of thought we are led to see that Nazism—which rejects the Christian tradition—is nevertheless the *natural* offspring of the Christian religion. It is the natural offspring in a double sense—for while it carries the idea of exclusive rightness to its natural conclusion, it is the illegitimate offspring of the spirit of Christ as portrayed in the gospels. But the better we realize its illegitimacy the better we should be able to realize that the generation of a world-wide moral effort is hindered if those who hold any particular faith maintain an attitude towards other religions and philosophies which is unduly exclusive and arrogant—an attitude which is too much akin to the Nazi claim for German superiority. That attitude, in either case, would appear to be a legacy of the Jewish "chosen race" theory.

Beyond this, and yet nearer home, we are faced with another limitation. While there is no question that the leaders of the Church desire to develop the greatest possible moral effort for the good of civilization, its effective development is restricted by conditions which they feel bound to impose. They are well aware that the extent of the active moral forces—embodied in those who are combatants for the same moral cause—far exceeds the content of the Churches. Unhappily they are hindered, not by their spirit but by the doctrine they have inherited, from helping to achieve the fullest possible concentration of force. They maintain, or at least retain, intellectual obstacles and doctrinal bars to the co-operation of many who are in moral and spiritual accord with them.

Since one of the chief obstacles is of an historical nature, I have

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

had reason to observe and examine it, and thus may be able to contribute something to the understanding of the problem it presents. As I came to an increasing conviction of the spiritual value of Christianity, it occurred to me that in view of the importance which the Church attached to its historicity, one ought to reach a clear idea about this, instead of rather vaguely accepting it, as most believers do. Thus I was led to carry out an examination of the New Testament in the same careful and critical way that one would treat any other historical document that has come down to us from early times. In the course of this examination, it became clear that very large portions of the narrative were quite incredible by any historical standard, and that there were so many palpable contradictions and relevant omissions in the remainder that one would not be justified in claiming that any particular point in it was historical fact, in the proper sense of the term—to maintain such a claim would require an act of faith which disregarded the test that a historian is expected to apply to evidence in general.

This does not mean that my studies led me to reject the New Testament story as definitely unhistorical in foundation, but simply that it was impossible to determine the extent of that foundation, and whether any particular bit of it had factual substance. What one credited as historical or not would have to depend on religious inclination, not on historical judgment. Subsequently I made some study of biblical criticism, by scholars of widely different points of view; while one was ready to accept what another rejected, the general effect of this textual examination tended to confirm the broad conclusion reached in the previous stage.

In reflection came the thought that the Church had created, and continued to create, needless and endless difficulties for itself by the excessive emphasis that it gave to the historical aspect of Christianity. And that if it were only willing to present the Christian story as *spiritual truth*, these difficulties could be overcome—while its progress would be all the better assured. For it could thus do more to bring out the sense of continuous revelation and evolution, teaching mankind to look forward, rather than backwards, as it has done to a perhaps excessive extent.

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

The sands of history form an uncertain foundation on which to establish a creed composed of factual statements. We can rest broad conclusions on these sands, but if we pin our faith to details they are liable to be washed away by the incoming sea of knowledge, and faith may crumble. If we rest on the broad truth of experience, we become more conscious of, and better able to breathe in, the spirit that moves above the ground-level of consciousness. That is the breath of life.

Into this sphere I venture with hesitation, and with a profound sense of humility, deepened by awareness of the limitations of knowledge and consciousness. Simply bearing personal witness, I would say that the further I have gone in study and thought the more I have become impressed by the *convergence*, as distinct from the coincidence, of all the great religious and philosophical thinkers on their uppermost levels. To put it another way, it seems to me that the spiritual development of humanity as a whole is like a pyramid, or a mountain peak, where all angles of ascent tend to converge the higher they climb. On the one hand this convergent tendency, and the remarkable degree of agreement that is to be found on the higher levels, appears to me the strongest argument from experience that morality is absolute and not merely relative, and that religious faith is not a delusion. On the other hand, it seems to me the most encouraging assurance of further progress—if only those who pursue spiritual truth can be brought to recognize their essential community of spirit, and learn to make the most of the points where they agree, instead of persistently stressing their differences and emphasizing their exclusiveness. In brief, and to illustrate my point by analogy, the hope of the future lies in developing the idea of a spiritual Commonwealth, not merely a spiritual United Kingdom.

### *Some Conclusions*

The germs of war find a focus in the convenient belief that "the end justifies the means." Each new generation repeats this argument—while succeeding generations have had reason to say that the end

## Why Don't We Learn From History?

their predecessors thus pursued was never justified by the fulfilment conceived. If there is one lesson that should be clear from history it is that bad means deform the end, or deflect its course thither. I would suggest the corollary that if we take care of the means the end will take care of itself.

Only second to the futility of pursuing ends reckless of the means is that of attempting progress by compulsion. History shows how often it leads to reaction. It also shows that the surer way is to generate and diffuse the idea of progress—providing a light to guide men, not a whip to drive them. Influence on thought has been the most influential factor in history, though, being less obvious than the effects of action, it has received less attention—even from writers of history. There is a general recognition that man's capacity for thought has been responsible for all human progress, but not yet an adequate appreciation of the historical effect of contributions to thought in comparison with that of spectacular action. Seen with a sense of proportion, the smallest permanent enlargement of men's thought is a greater achievement, and ambition, than the construction of something material that crumbles, the conquest of a kingdom that collapses, or the leadership of a movement that ends in a rebound.

In the conquest of mind-space it is the inches, consolidated, that count. Also for the spread and endurance of an idea the originator is dependent on the self-development of the receivers and transmitters—far more dependent than is the initiator of an action upon its executants. In the physical sphere subordination can serve as a substitute for co-operation, and, although inferior, can go a long way towards producing effective action. But the progress of ideas, if it is to be a true progress, depends on co-operation in a much higher degree, and on a higher kind of co-operation. In this sphere the leader may still be essential, but instead of fusing individuals into a mass through the suppression of their individuality and the contraction of their thought, the lead that he gives only has effect, lighting-effect, in proportion to the elevation of individuality and the expansion of thought. For collective action it suffices if the mass can be managed; collective growth is only possible through the



## Why Don't We Learn From History?

freedom and enlargement of individual minds. It is not the man, still less the mass, that counts; but the many.

Once the collective importance of each individual in helping or hindering progress is appreciated, the experience contained in history is seen to have a personal, not merely a political, significance. What can the individual learn from history—as a guide to living? Not what to do, but what to strive for. And what to avoid in striving. The importance and intrinsic value of behaving decently. The importance of seeing clearly—not least of seeing himself clearly.

To face life with clear eyes—desirous to see the truth—and to come through it with clean hands, behaving with consideration for others, while achieving such conditions as enable a man to get the best out of life, is enough for ambition—and a high ambition. Only as a man progresses towards it, does he realize what effort it entails, and how large is the distance to go.

It is strange how people assume that no training is needed in the pursuit of truth. It is stranger still that this assumption is often manifest in the very man who talks of the difficulty of determining what is true. We should recognize that for this pursuit any one requires at least as much care and training as a boxer for a fight or a runner for a Marathon. He has to learn how to detach his *thinking* from every desire and interest, from every sympathy and antipathy—like ridding oneself of superfluous tissue, the “tissue” of untruth which all human beings tend to accumulate, for their own comfort and protection. And he must keep fit, to become fitter. In other words, he must be true to the light he has seen.

He may realize that the world is a jungle. But if he has seen that it could be better for everyone if the simple principles of decency and kindness were generally applied, then he must in honesty try to practice these consistently and to live, personally, as if they were general. In other words, he must follow the light he has seen.

Since he will be following it through a jungle, however, he should bear in mind the supremely practical guidance provided nearly two thousand years ago—“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

THE END

